

GREAT CHANGES**NO. 2934****A SERMON****PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, MAY 4, 1905****DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON****AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON****IN THE YEAR 1862***“And behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last.”**Luke 13:30*

IN some of the books printed in the olden times, the authors were known to put a hand in the margin, as if to point out some passage to which they would have particular attention directed. Now, wherever we see in Holy Scripture the word “behold,” it answers the same end. It is intended to show us that there is either something new, something impressive, or something which is speedily to transpire, and therefore needs immediate attention. Or else there is usually something contrary to what men expect and therefore their consideration is the more earnestly directed to it. Seeing this “behold” in the margin, a signpost as it were, a directory for us to stop and pause and learn—let us do so tonight, and may the Spirit of God be our Instructor, that we may listen to profit.

“There are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last.” Similar passages occur in Matthew and Mark as well as in Luke. In Matthew, the connection in which it stands shows that there Christ intended it to relate to temporal circumstances. Peter had told him that he, together with his fellow apostles, had left all that he had to follow Christ. And his Master informed him that he should be no loser by it, but that, the rather, he should greatly profit through having left house and lands, and children and wife, for Christ’s name’s sake and the Gospel’s.

“For,” said Christ, “there be last which shall be first, and there be first which shall be last.” Brethren, let us then hear and understand this, that *circumstances shall very soon be altered*. The high and mighty shall not always be so elevated. The base and mean shall not always occupy such a humiliating position. Throughout the whole history of the world, sin has been striding in high places with shoes of iron and brass, while godliness has walked barefoot through the valley.

Multitudes of most ungodly men have worn the tiara and have thrown the purple about their shoulders, while a far more than equal number of the virtuous have been slaves to tug the galley oar, or have been condemned to long imprisonments, or have “wandered about in sheep-skins and goat-skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented.”

Still, Dives wears the scarlet and fine linen, and fares sumptuously every day, while Lazarus lies at his gate full of sores and the dogs give him the charity of their tongues. Still Nero is on the throne and Paul rots in the Mamertine dungeon. Still a Charles II shall have the crown, while the Puritan shall be found “despised and rejected of men.” You can scarcely turn to any page of history in which you do not see the wicked in great power, spreading himself like a green bay tree, while the righteous is plagued all daylong and chastened every morning.

Well, the time is coming when all this shall be changed. One wave of your hand, O Death! and where is the dignity of sin? One blast of Your breath, O God! and where are the glories of the mighty? Where are the pomp and the power of the ungodly man who vexed Your saints? See there, Dives has gone down to the nethermost pit and Lazarus is lifted to the throne.

See there, Nero rots and is corrupt, while Paul, on angels’ wings, is borne to the right hand of the Majesty on high. Poverty-stricken, having hardly a place where he can lay his head, the humble tentmaker took rank with the very lowest, but though last, he now stands first, nearest the eternal throne,—

“Midst the bright ones, doubly bright.”

Proud, having all the earth at his beck, Rome’s legions at his call, Nero reigned and thought himself a god, but now the meanest slave is greater than he, and they mock and jeer him, even they, the princes who lost their thrones by him and the men whom he trampled in the dust. In hades, they greet him with the cry, “Art thou become like one of us?” and marvel greatly because the mighty are fallen and the proud are stained in the mire.

Patience, then, patience, you who are the sons of poverty and yet the sons of God. Hush your boasting, you that are the heirs of wrath and yet the heirs of fortune—the tables shall soon turn—eternity shall undo the incongruities of life. Time! your inequalities shall all be forgotten, justice shall right every wrong, “the first shall be last, and the last shall be first.”

So, brethren, to pass on, there is no doubt that *this is equally true with regard to the world’s esteem*. For many a long year, the precious sons of God, comparable to fine gold, have been esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter. For the first three centuries there was no villainy too vile to be laid at the door of the Christians. They were baser than the greatest miscreants. The world hooted them from the streets. No terms were thought bad enough for them. “It is not fit that they should live,” was the world’s verdict upon the followers of the Crucified.

And even today a godly man is held in no reputation. There are no racks, ’tis true—no prisons, no fines—but there are the jeer and the mockery, the shrugging of the shoulder, the reviling, the shame, and the spitting—these have not ceased even now. Genius, intellect, science, taste, poetry, and literature have their golden shrines. Godliness it just tolerated in its own conventicle.

I may be addressing some Christian men, some young converts especially, who feel it very hard to have the cold shoulder in society, to be neglected by their friends, to be threatened by their parents, to be forsaken by all who once counted them to be good. Ay, patience, patience, patience! You that are the last for Christ shall be the first with Christ by and by.

Those that are first today in honor, and think themselves great and famous because *they* will never yield to fanaticism, because *they* will never be enthusiastic after Christ—they shall be among the last. The day comes when they shall “awake to shame and everlasting contempt.” The organs of public sentiment will change their tone. The world that honored the ungodly shall see their shame. The eyes that once looked slightly on saints shall be made to honor them as the noblest of the noble and they that hated Christ shall be lightly esteemed. Let those two thoughts be riveted upon our memories.

But I choose to dwell rather upon two other thoughts. The first part of my text seems to me to teach *wonders of grace*, and the next part of it seems to me to teach *wonders of sin*.

I. Here, surely, is A WONDER OF GRACE—“There are last that shall be first.”

Here is divine sovereignty—choosing the last to make them first. Here is sovereign grace—forgiving the greatest sin to make the brightest saint. Here is almighty power changing the most degraded, turning the current of the most strong-minded sinner and making his soul “willing in the day of God’s power.”

What means it, those that are last? I take it, if I understand the sense aright, it means this. There are some that are *last in pedigree*, born of impious parents in some low hovel, in some dingy room, an attic or a cellar, in some court, where the first sound that reached their ear was blasphemy, and the first sight that greeted their eye was drunkenness. How many we have of such in London, who are indeed last if we consider their birth!

Poor things, they are born not simply to poverty, but they seem to be the nurslings of vice. One’s eyes might weep tears of blood when we think how unhappily some children are placed in the very first moment of their advent into society. Glory be to God, however, there are some of these that shall be first. God will find His jewels in the dens, and alleys, and slums of London, and take up to His eternal throne those that were the sons of harlots and the children of the thief—that they may sing forever of His amazing grace.

Last, too, they are in education. Turned out into the street to pick up from every boy the vice he has acquired, to learn from evil men villainy of which their young hearts would not have dreamed. If you should go into our Ragged schools, especially some in the very lowest neighborhoods, or if you would hear Mr. Gregory, the missionary in St. Giles's, tell his tale of all the sin he sees and the education that our young men of St. Giles's get, O gentlemen of St. James's! it might well make you blush—blush with shame that you are not doing something for them—shame for yourselves that you let your neighbors live like this. Your neighbors still they are, though they are hidden behind the tall houses of your gorgeous streets and crescents, your squares and terraces.

Well, these are last in education, but glory be to God, some who were trained for the gallows and tutored for the convict settlement, shall, nevertheless, be taught of the Lord and inducted into the fellowship of the saints. Irresistible grace shall come and pluck them out of the furnace, hating the garment spotted with the flesh, yet esteeming them that they also may be jewels in the Redeemer's crown.

Then, again, they are *last in morals*. At eventide, see her as she goes out to hunt for souls. See him, too, as at eventide he reels from gin palace to gin palace, to drink, to swear, to curse. Ah! we are not without those who are last in morals in this huge den of vice, this city of iniquity. Could Sodom find sinners that would match with the sinners of London? What think you? Could Tyre and Sidon outvie the iniquities that are near our doors and may be seen in our own streets? I think not.

You need not, tonight, go many steps when once the sun is down before you will see under every gaslight some that are last. Blessed be God—some of them shall be first. Praise the Lord, you angels, there are some of them here tonight, some of them saved, some of them snatched from the fire, and they will sing in heaven—and they do sing on earth right sweetly to the praise of the love that has made the last to be the first.

What though some of these appear, beside their moral debasement, to have *the last disposition that could ever be susceptible of grace*? You know the men I mean. Men that, when you look into their faces, you feel you would not like to meet them on a dark night. There are such men, whose very countenances betray a stolidity and hardness that is not altogether common to men.

Do you remember what the Scotsman said to Rowland Hill, when he looked long into his face? and Rowland asked him, "What are you looking there for?" "I was looking at the lines on your face," said he. "And what do you think of me?" said Rowland. "Why," said the man, "I was thinking that, if it hadn't been for the grace of God, you would have been one of the biggest scoundrels living." And Rowland said 'twas even so. He felt that himself. And I think we have all felt so. We have all felt, as one good man said, "There goes John Bradford, if it were not for the grace of God." To the ale-house, to the prison, to the gallows—each of us might have come if sovereign grace had not prevented.

There are men who seem naturally more coarse, more rough, more wild, more outrageous than others. They have furious passions, they have a fiendish temper. What other word could I use? They have a temper that seems to make them like very maniacs over a little provocation. They know not what to do, but stamp and rave, and say they know not what. These are the last men you would think could be saved.

Ay, but there are many of them that have been made first. Strange is it that God picks out the very men whom we would throw away—the most worthless, the most hopeless, hapless, and helpless. Sovereign grace had fixed its eye upon them and said of each one of them, "I will have that man." That man's will stood out stoutly and resisted to the uttermost the pleading voice of salvation, but grace would have him. O that strong will of his, how useful it is now in the cause of Christ! That hard heart of his, now softened, seems to give a holy courage, and a dauntless and a fearless manner which would be unknown to men of a different mold. "There are last that shall be first."

What inferences do we draw from all this? We draw these lessons. There is an encouragement for some of you who think you are last. I bless God there are always some of the last ones coming into the Tabernacle. God deliver us from having an exclusively respectable congregation! I like to see men of all

classes. I do like to see the poor come in, and I like to see the base and vile come in—and I know they do.

I feel like Rowland Hill, when it was said to him, “It is only the tag, rag, and bobtail that go to Surrey Chapel.” “Ah, then!” he said, “Welcome tag, and welcome rag, and welcome bobtail—these are just the sort we want to see come into the chapel.” “Ah,” I hear someone say with a sigh, “that means me, that means me. I am one of those men. I am one of the last.” Then there is encouragement for you. Mercy’s gates stand wide open and Christ invites you in. Trust Him at this very hour, for, “There are last that shall be first.”

And brethren, what cause for humiliation to us who are saved! Were not we the last? I am sure, when I look at that headstrong boy, when I think of that hard, stubborn boy, that never did and would not yield—when I think of that child who could bear any measure of chastisement, but never would make an apology for anything—and then think of myself saved by grace, I marvel. How is it that God should choose such a one as I am? And I think you can all say, “Why me, Lord? Why me?” And you can put it down to this, “There are last that shall be first.”

And what a reason this is why you and I should serve Christ, too! What, did He look on me when I was last and will I not work for Him? Stand out of the way, you groups of cold-hearted men. Stand out of the way, you careless professors, that cannot serve your Master, I must and will do God service, for I owe Him more than you do.

Mary, I implore you, by the gentleness of your spirit, stand back, stand back. I *must* break my alabaster box over that blessed head, for I have much forgiven, and therefore I love much. I *must* do much for Him. Give me great sinners to make great saints. They are glorious raw material for grace to work upon, and when you do get them saved, they will shake the very gates of hell. The ringleaders in Satan’s camp make noble sergeants in the camp of Christ. The bravest of the brave are they. God send us many such and we will sweep before us yet the hosts of evil and drive iniquity into the depths of the sea. “There are last that shall be first.”

O dear friends, I wish the net would catch some of the last right now. I know that young man over there thinks that Christ will never save him. “There are last that shall be first.” I know that young woman has written it down in her conscience that she is an odd person—she is sure to be passed over—one of the last, I see. Ah, and you shall be among the first. Only believe Christ, only trust Him. He is God. He *can* save you. He is man. He is *willing* to save you. Trust Him, His promise is given, He will save you, He will wash you from every sin, and bring you with joy before His face at the last.

II. But now I must take the second part of the text, as briefly as possible, and speak of WONDERS OF SIN. “There are first that shall be last.”

First in ancestry, hushed to your slumber with a holy lullaby, dandled on the knee of piety, hanging at the breast of tenderness and love—from your mother’s arms you shall go to the frightful grasp of the destroyer, and from a father’s rejected counsel to the sinner’s direst doom!

“There are first that shall be last.” *First in training*, taught in the Sunday school, prayed over, wept over.

“There are first that shall be last.” *First in privileges*, sitting under a faithful ministry, warned, exhorted, entreated, pleaded with. “There are first that shall be last.” Having much light and knowledge, having an awakened conscience, but quenching it, having the warnings of the Spirit, but stifling them. “There are first that shall be last.” Regularly in the house of God, well-read in Scripture, well-trained in doctrine, understanding the way of God, but not running in it, knowing your duty but doing it not. “There are first that shall be last.”

O my Hearers, I speak to thousands of you that are among the first tonight! When I said there were last ones here, I glanced for the few, but oh, how many of you belong to the tribes and families of men who are of the first! You are not Sabbath-breakers, the most of you—you go to a place of worship. You are not heathens—you have a Bible, you do read it sometimes—and you know what faith in Christ means, if you have it not in your hearts.

O London! London! London! You fair metropolis of merchandize and wealth! How are you exalted to heaven by your privileges! Christ is preached in the corner of every street now, in your parks, in your fields. Christ is preached in your theatres, He is preached where every man can hear of Him if he will. First and foremost as you stand, O inhabitants of London, the envy of many nations and their refuge of the oppressed of all nations—how many of you shall be worse off than the savages of Africa or the cannibals of New Zealand! “There are first that shall be last.”

I cannot preach on this text. I have not the strength, I have not the power of thought to point out this solemn truth as I fain would and to thrust it on your consciences. I can only thus make it ring and sound in your ears by saying again, “There are first that shall be last.”

Remember, if it be so with you—and this is the conclusion of the whole matter—your being last will involve awful responsibilities because you *were* first. You cannot perish as others do. If you do reject Christ, how shall you escape who neglect so great a salvation? Sirs, I tell you, it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah than for you in the day of judgment.

Besides this, how shall you escape from the remorse of your conscience, when conscience, wide awake, shall cry, “You knew your duty, but you did it not”? The caverns of Hades shall say, with dull and dreary echoes, “You knew your duty, but you did it not.” Every revolution of eternity, as it brings some fresh crisis of your pain, shall say to you, “You knew your duty, but you did it not.”

Banished from heaven to Tophet, from the Temple of the Lord to Gehenna, from the voice of the minister to weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, from the song of the sanctuary to the howlings of the pit—this, this shall be the edge of the sword, this the tooth of the devouring worm—“You knew your duty, but you did it not.”

O you first ones, God help you! If you ever should be last, how terrible will be your doom! Let us then engage in great searching of heart tonight. I search my own soul now—what if I, standing first in Gospel privileges, the teacher of this people—what if I be among the last? My brethren, you the elders and deacons of this church, the first in our Israel—what if you are among the last?

You young men and women of our Catechumen classes, of our Bible classes—you young men of our College, first, most hopeful of all—what if you be found among the last? You Sunday school teachers and superintendents, you who teach young children the way to heaven—what if you learn not the way to heaven yourselves? What if you, the first, should be the last?

You, the beloved of my soul, whom these hands have baptized into the Lord Jesus Christ, you with whom we have had sweet communion at the blessed feast of the Lord’s table—what if you, the first, should be among the last? I can but reiterate the cry, I can but stand here, like Jonah, and cry aloud with one unvarying note of warning, “Take heed, you first, that you are not among the last!”

And what shall we all say, rolling the two sentences into one? O grace, make me among the first. Let me not be among the last at the last! O God, help me now to escape from hell and fly to heaven! I do accept Christ as my Savior.

*“Nothing in my hands I bring,
Simply to the cross I cling.”*

Say that in your souls after me, you who feel it,—

*“Just as I am, and waiting not
To rid my soul of one dark blot,
To Thee whose blood can cleanse each spot
O Lamb of God, I come.”*

Trust the Master now, my hearers. Say in your spirits, “Yes, we’re guilty and vile. Save us, Lord, or we perish.” Let the cry of your repentance and the utterance of your faith go up to heaven in one sound. And then God commissions us to say to you, from His Word, that He absolves you from the guilt of all

your sin when you have believed in Jesus Christ His Son. He that *believeth* on the Son hath everlasting life and shall never perish. He shall never come into condemnation, but the love of God shall rest on him in time and eternity. God grant it to us all, for His name's sake!

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

PSALM 51 AND 142

Psalm 51:—This Psalm is dedicated to the chief musician, so that it was intended to be sung. Yet it is not by any means a joyous piece of music. It seems more fit to be sung—or sighed—as a solo for the solitary penitence of a broken heart than for the united songs of believers. Yet, in God's ear, it is clear that the voice of penitence is full of music, for this penitential Psalm is dedicated to the chief musician.

Verse 1. *Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness:*

No eye can spy out the tender attributes of God like an eye that is sore with weeping on account of acknowledged sin, so David prays, "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness." This word "lovingkindness" is a rich double word and it was specially suitable just then, for he who has a broken heart—bruised and broken on account of sin, needs double mercy from God.

1. *According unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.*

"They are on record and I cannot erase the terrible lines, nor can You erase them, O Lord, without displaying a multitude of Your tender mercies. It will need omnipotence itself to get rid of this gravure in the brass. Therefore, 'according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.'"

2. *Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity.*

"Wash me through and through, O Lord. Wash me thoroughly!" A hypocrite is satisfied with the washing of his garments, but the true penitent cries, "Wash *me*. 'Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity.' It is almost the only thing that I can really call my own, and it is most sadly mine, O Lord, wash mine iniquity right away!"

2. *And cleanse me from my sin.*

"If washing will not suffice, put me in the fire, but somehow, anyhow, O Lord, cleanse me from my sin!" You notice that David's prayer is not concerning the punishment of his sin, but concerning the sin itself. That is the one thing which is eating into his heart—look how many words he uses to describe it—"My sin; mine iniquity; my transgressions." He cries to God to help him to get rid of that which is the source of all his sorrow. The thief dreads the gallows, but the penitent fears not the punishment of his sin—it is the sin itself that terrifies him.

3. *For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.*

"I cannot get away from it and I cannot get rid of it. It stares me in the face. It haunts me in my lying down and my rising up. I am obliged to acknowledge my sin, for it is ever before me."

4. *Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight:*

"It is true that I have grieved others and that I have done much injury to others by my sin, but in all this, I have sinned most against You. The virus—the essence of my sin is that it has been committed against You, O my God!"

4. *That thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.*

"My sin was committed within Your jurisdiction and against Your law, O Lord, and therefore, as I am summoned to appear at Your court, I cannot disobey the summons. I am compelled to give an answer to the charge brought against me—and my answer is that I am guilty, without any extenuating circumstances that I can plead before You, O Lord! I am guilty through and through."

5. *Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.*

David does not say that by way of making an excuse for himself, but rather to aggravate his own guilt. He admits that his guiltiness is really a part of himself. He does not say, "Lord, I was acting contrary to my nature when I committed this sin. You know that it was not like me to do that." Oh, no!

but he says, “Lord, You know that I was acting quite in accordance with my nature. It was just like me to fall into this terrible sin.”

We have sometimes heard people say that they were surprised to find that they had been guilty of certain sins—let it not be so with you, but rather be you surprised to find yourself kept from guilt, wonder when you are preserved from sin—for the whole tendency of unrenewed human nature is towards iniquity. “In sin did my mother conceive me.”

6. *Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.*

As much as to say, “Lord, that which You desire to see in me is not there, and though You have made me also to desire it, yet I fear that I have not at present gone beyond the desire, for still within me, in my secret soul, there lies a tendency to evil, and unless I keep a strict watch over myself, I soon go astray. Lord, make me inwardly clean. I cannot bear that it should be otherwise with me.”

7. *Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean:*

As the priest purges the unclean man by dipping the bunch of hyssop into the blood of the sacrifice, and then sprinkling him with it, so, “purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean.”

7. *Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.*

“That is to say, I shall be clean if You do wash me, O Lord! My own washings make me no cleaner. My own purgations make me fouler than I was before, but if You will purge me, and if You will do it with the sacrificial blood, then I shall be whiter than snow.” This is grand faith on David’s part.

I cannot help calling your attention to it—that he, with a sense of his sin heavy upon him and bowed down to the very earth with the consciousness of his great guilt, yet dares to say, “Wash me”—adulterous, murderous David—“wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” No faith brings greater glory to God than the faith of the consciously guilty when they dare to believe that God can forgive them. Not even the unfallen seraphim can render to God purer homage than when you, a defiled and condemned sinner, dare to believe in the mercy of God in Christ Jesus and so believe as to say, with David, “Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.”

8. *Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.*

If a good man ever goes astray, he may depend upon it that his sin will be very costly to him. And the better a man is, the more expensive will his sin be to him in the long run. God breaks the very bones of His children when He chastens them for their sin. I do not doubt that, many a time, their pilgrim way has been all the more weary in their later days by reason of their sins in their earlier days. There is many a pain that shoots through old bones, that is meant to remind the old bones what they were when they were young. God will certainly chasten us for our iniquities if we are His own people.

9. *Hide thy face from my sins,*

“Lord, do not look at them. Refuse to see them. Hide Your face, not from me, but from my sins.”

9. *And blot out all mine iniquities.*

See how he comes back to that note again and again? He is never long away from it. There are certain tunes in which one note is constantly repeated, so is it here. David prays, “O God, put away my sin, blot out my sin, forgive my sin.” He cries for nothing else but that—“Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities.” He longs for the time when not one of them shall be in existence.

10-11. *Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me.*

These are the groanings of a true child of God. Never has a man, without the Spirit of God within him, prayed to God in this fashion. David, therefore, notwithstanding all his sin, still had the life of God within his soul, and when Nathan came to reprove him, the sacred fire began to burn again. Here are some of the sparks of it—and some of the smoke of it, too, “‘Cast me not away from thy presence’—

“Dismiss me not from thy service, Lord.”

“Say not, ‘I can no longer use you. You shall no longer stand in My courts, for you have disgraced My livery. Get you gone from My presence.’ ‘Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me.’”

12. *Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.*

David longs for his Lord to come back to him. When God flogs His children, they still cling to Him and they cry to Him. They do not wish to run away and hide themselves from Him. No, their only comfort is to weep upon their Father’s bosom and to wait for the kiss of forgiveness from His lips. So David prays, “Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.”

13. *Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee.*

Do you not see, brothers and sisters, that we must be in a right state of heart if we are to serve God well? We cannot teach transgressors His way, with a confident hope that they will be converted to Him, unless we ourselves possess the joy of God’s salvation and are upheld by His Holy Spirit. If we go to God’s work out of order, we shall make a mess of it and accomplish nothing that is really worth doing. But when God gives us His comforting grace within, and His upholdings on every hand, then shall we teach with power and sinners shall learn to profit—“Then will I teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee.”

14. *Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.*

None sing so loudly the praises of Redeeming grace as those who have been forgiven great sins. There is no music, outside heaven, that has such a volume of God-glorifying praise in it as the song of the man who loves much because he has had much forgiven—“My tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.”

15. *O Lord, open thou my lips;*

He felt as if he could not be trusted to open his own lips, and certainly, he was not to be trusted to open his own eyes, for when he had aforetime opened them, he had looked on that which led him into sin. So now he would have God to keep his very lips, that he shall never speak again except as he shall be guided from on high—“O Lord, open thou my lips;”

15-16. *And my mouth shall shew forth thy praise. For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it:*

Very naturally, David’s mind began to think of the multitudes of bullocks, and lambs, and rams that were burnt upon JEHOVAH’s altar. There is nothing that makes a man so spiritual and so evangelical as a deep sense of sin. You cannot be a sacramentarian and a ceremonialist very long if you have a broken heart. Those pretty toys do very well for the kind of “miserable sinners” who do not know what either misery or sin means. But he who really has had his heart broken on account of the guilt of his sin cannot be content with the mere outward sacrifice—he must have that which is spiritual—“Thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it.”

16-17. *Thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.*

David has come to feel that it is better to have one genuine sigh for sin than to make ten thousand bullocks shed their blood upon the sacrificial altar. And if you are truly broken from your sin—if you do really hate it and cry to God for the pardon of it—if the Spirit of God has really given you complete cleansing from your guilt by the precious blood of Jesus—this is better than all the material sacrifices offered in all the temples that were ever built and overlaid with gold. “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.”

18. *Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem.*

As much as though David said, “I have done great hurt to Zion, I have pulled down the walls of Jerusalem by my sin. Now, Lord, build them up again. Undo the mischief which Your poor foolish servant has wrought by his backslidings.” So may any backsliders amongst us pray to the Lord, “Visit Your church so graciously, Lord, that my sin may not injure her!”

19. *Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering: then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar.*

Oh, yes, we are sure to bring to God the best that we have when we once get our sins forgiven. After we have looked to Christ, who is the one great sacrifice for sin, then we bring to God all that we can to show how grateful we are for His pardoning mercy.

Psalm 142. Maschil of David. A prayer when he was in the cave. This “Maschil of David” is instructive to us, for the experience of one believer is very edifying to another. We are so much alike that, as in water, face answers to face, so the heart of men answers to man—and what one believer has felt awakens sympathy in the rest of God’s people.

Psalm 142:1-2. *I cried unto the LORD with my voice; with my voice unto the LORD did I make my supplication. I poured out my complaint before him; I shewed before him my trouble.*

David mentions that he prayed with his voice. This is an unimportant matter compared with praying with the heart, but when the heart is full of prayer, it is often very helpful to be able to use the voice to give expression to the emotions of the soul. To have a room in which, without disturbing others and without ostentatiously revealing your private experiences to others, you can speak aloud unto the Lord, will be found to be a great advantage in prayer.

Some men’s thoughts become more concentrated and flow more freely—and their hearts are better able to pour out their deepest and fullest expressions when they can pray aloud. So David says that, in the cave, where he would not be likely to disturb anybody, he cried with his voice unto the Lord—“With my voice unto the LORD did I make my supplication.”

You can see from verse 2 what was the style of his prayer. “I poured out my complaint.” The figure is a very simple one. Just as you pour out water from a bottle, so David let his heart’s complaint flow out before the Lord. In pouring out water, it sometimes comes slowly gurgling, and sometimes fast—at times with a rush, followed by a pause.

There is no prayer better than that which naturally flows from the renewed heart, without any strain or effort. It was so with David—“I poured out my complaint before him, I shewed before him my trouble.” Just as a patient shows his wounds to the surgeon, so take away the covering from your broken heart and wounded spirit, and set your trouble before the Lord, who already sees it. It will be no novelty or cause of surprise to Him, but He desires you to manifest such trustfulness in Him as will lead you to lay before Him your complaint and your trouble.

3. *When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou knewest my path.*

“My spirit was so overwhelmed within me, that I did not know where I was, or what I was. I could not make head or tail of myself. I seemed to be like a skein of silk or wool in a tangle. My thoughts, as George Herbert would have said, were all a case of knives, sharp to cut and wound. I could not make myself out. I was a puzzle even to myself, but ‘thou knewest my path’ even then.”

3-4. *In the way wherein I walked have they privily laid a snare for me. I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul.*

This is a terrible condition for anyone to be in—to have every friend forsake you—to find that those who used to know you best, do not want to know you any longer, but turn their heads away as if it would be a disgrace to them to be known to have been your friends. This is a grand opportunity for testing the reality of your faith.

Can you believe God now? Can you take Him to be your Friend now that you have not another friend in the world? Fine-weather faith is very cheap and easily obtained—but the faith that can stand fast in the time of the storm and tempest—that hardy mountaineering faith which hides in God in the coldest winter and finds its summertime in Him alone—that is the faith that is worth having and worth keeping.

6. *I cried unto thee, O LORD: I said, Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living.*

“I left the broken reeds alone and leaned upon my God. I said, You are my refuge and my portion in the land of the living.”

6-7. *Attend unto my cry; for I am brought very low: deliver me from my persecutors; for they are stronger than I. Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name: the righteous shall compass me about; for thou shalt deal bountifully with me.*

This is a beautiful metaphor, suggesting that when the saints heard that God brought him out of prison, they would gather round him, gaze upon him as a miracle of mercy and ask him to tell them his wonderful tale. He would be the center of their delighted observation, and their own faith and hope in the Lord would be greatly increased.

As a little imprisoned bird might long for emancipation, David says, “O Lord, open my cage door and let me fly, and I will sing, as I mount, to the praise of Him who gave me my liberty. ‘Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name: the righteous shall compass me about, for thou shalt deal bountifully with me.’”

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.